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# REVISITING LUCIUS VERUS' EASTERN CAMPAIGN

Revisando la campaña oriental de Lucio Vero

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**Abstract:** After Trajan's Parthian campaign (115-117 AD), the situation in the Roman Empire's eastern frontier seems to have been characterized by a state of peace filled with diplomatic tension. Soon after the death of Antoninus Pius and the rise of co-emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in the year 161, Arsacid king Vologases IV launched an offensive in which the philo-Roman king of Armenia was deposed and Roman possessions in Syria were attacked. After the failed attempts of withstanding the attack, the Senate decreed the mobilisation of an army under Verus' command, who set his headquarters in Antioch in the final months of 162. From there, after the appropriate preparation, Roman counter-offensive is carried out in three different fronts: Armenia, Osrhoene and Syria-Mesopotamia. The latter, led by Avidius Cassius, would culminate with the capture and sack of the twin cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon. The present study will revise the aforementioned facts through the information given by primary sources.

**Resumen:** Tras la campaña parta de Trajano (115-117 d.C.), la situación en la frontera oriental del Imperio Romano parece haber estado marcada por una paz cargada de tensión diplomática. Poco después de la muerte de Antonino Pío y el ascenso de los co-emperadores Marco Aurelio y Lucio Vero en el año 161, el rey arsácida Vologases IV lanzó una ofensiva en la que se depuso al rey filorromano de Armenia y se atacaron las posesiones romanas en Siria. Tras los fallidos esfuerzos de contener el ataque, el Senado decretó la movilización de un ejército bajo el mando de Vero. El emperador se estableció en Antioquía a

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finales del 162, y desde allí se dirigirá la contraofensiva romana, en tres frentes diferenciados: Armenia, Osroena y Siria-Mesopotamia. Esta última campaña, liderada por Avidio Casio, culminaría con la toma y saqueo de las ciudades gemelas de Seleucia y Ctesifonte. El presente trabajo constituye una revisión de los hechos aquí descritos a través de las fuentes primarias.

**Palabras clave:** Lucio Vero; guerras romano-partas; Partia; Vologases IV; Marco Aurelio; Roma; Antoninos; siglo II d.C.; Capadocia; Siria; Armenia; Mesopotamia; Osroena

**Palabras clave:** Lucius Verus; Roman-Parthian Wars; Parthia; Vologases IV; Marcus Aurelius; Rome; Antonines; II century A.D.; Cappadocia; Syria; Armenia; Mesopotamia; Osrhoene

## 1. Introduction

*Sed pro bello tam ingenti, tam gravi, tot et tam longinquis locis gesto, narrationes quae nobis traditae sunt quam tenues sunt, quam aridae!*<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally, knowledge on the Roman-Parthian War of 161-166 A.D. has been hindered by two major issues. On the one hand, literary sources are scarce, and the main ones are either fragmented or biased. On the other hand (and probably as a consequence of the former), modern scholarship's attempts to fill the blanks has led to the construction of narratives in which recorded facts, more or less founded deductions and even risky hypotheses are all confusingly interwoven. The aim of this study is to craft an account that will make it possible to clearly discern what is adequately established and why from what is merely a possibility or a suggestion, in the belief that only through this prior cleansing can a solid foundation be laid for future research. This will be achieved via a methodical examination of the full *corpus* of available primary sources (literary, epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological), followed by a comparison with the different accounts given by modern historians.

## 2. The Parthian Offensive

On March 161 Antoninus Pius died, being succeeded by co-emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Shortly afterwards that same year, Vologases IV of Parthia launches the offensive that, according to the *Historia Augusta*, was planning since the reign of Antoninus

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<sup>1</sup> Napp, 1879: 20.

Pius<sup>2</sup>. It is reasonable to assume, as some do, that the Arsacid king saw these two young and inexperienced emperors' accession to the throne as the perfect opportunity to strike<sup>3</sup>.

## 2.1. Attack on Armenia

As in past occasions, Armenia is revealed to be one of the main conflict areas between Romans and Arsacids, being Vologases' first objective. According to numismatic sources, a Parthian army would have entered Armenia in 161 with the usual objective: to replace the philoroman ruler of the region (who may or may not have been Sohaemus, the monarch later put in charge by the Romans after their victory)<sup>4</sup> by their candidate, named Pacorus<sup>5</sup>.

### *The «foolish Celt» and the false prophet*

Roman incursions into Armenia were usually carried out from the bordering province of Cappadocia, in Anatolia's easternmost limit. Its governor and commander (*legatus Augusti pro praetore*) in 161 was C. Sedatius Severianus<sup>6</sup>, about whom Lucian provides information in his *Alexander*. Severianus, of Gaulish origins<sup>7</sup>, would have fallen under the influence of the oracle Alexander of Abonoteichus, who, promising him glory, would have convinced the «foolish Celt» of hastily marching into Armenia<sup>8</sup>.

This decision would soon prove catastrophic. The governor, most likely following Trajan's route<sup>9</sup>, marched east with a legion, where he was shortly thereafter intercepted and besieged in the city of Elegeia by the Parthian force. After three days of siege, the Arsacids took the city and decimated the legion, including the officers and Severianus himself, who is believed to have committed suicide<sup>10</sup>.

### *Severianus' 'mystery legion'*

Our sources do not explicitly mention the name of the legion annihilated at Elegeia, but modern scholars have attempted to reconstruct its identity based on indirect evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> For Vologases' alleged plans, cf. Hist. Aug. *Aur.*, 8.6.

<sup>3</sup> Birley, 2000: 158; Birley, 2012: 217; Bishop, 2018: 92.

<sup>4</sup> The coins in Cohen, 1882: *Ant.* 686-689 portray a *Rex Armeniis datus* in 140/144, who would have ruled until 161. Bishop, 2018: 92 and Debevoise, 1938: 252 identify him as Sohaemus, the philoroman King installed in Armenia once Statius Priscus retakes the region in 163/4.

<sup>5</sup> Fronto *Ad Verum Imp.* II.1.15. Some scholars identify him as the *Aurelios Pakoros* in *CIG* 6559, inscription that mentions him as *βασιλεύς μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας*. However, the location, the name Aurelios and the mention to a brother living in Rome do not seem to favour this theory (cf. Van den Hout, 1999: 302).

<sup>6</sup> *ILS* 9487.

<sup>7</sup> *AE* 1981, 640.

<sup>8</sup> Luc. *Alex* 26-27 (*ὁ ἡλίθιος ἐκεῖνος Κελτὸς*).

<sup>9</sup> Debevoise, 1938: 246.

<sup>10</sup> Luc. *Alex.* 27; D.C. 71.2.1.

The most recurring one is an inscription dated from 162 (with addenda from 165)<sup>11</sup> in which all of the empire's legions are listed from east to west. The omission of legio IX Hispana in this and later epigraphic sources has led authors like Birley to propose Hispana as Severianus' legion. However, the fact that the last update we have on the legion shows it stationed in Britannia does not seem to favour the hypothesis<sup>12</sup>. The other candidate worth of mention is the XXII Deiotariana, also missing in the epigraphic evidence and last identified in Egypt in 119, but it is equally unlikely for it to have ended up in Cappadocia<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, there is no evidence on these legions surviving until 161: they could have been easily dismissed or destroyed in the previous conflicts.

## 2.2. The problem of Edessa and numismatic evidence

After successfully dominating Armenia, the Parthian army would have started marching south heading to Syria<sup>14</sup>. To do so, the logical route is through the adjacent region of Osrhoene. The toponym entails a certain degree of imprecision regarding its limits, and its political situation during the years before the war is completely unknown. Thus, we can only presume that the region was made up of semi-independent political entities grouped around the city of Edessa, wavering between alliance and subjugation by the two superpowers of Rome and Parthia.

The only factual evidence is provided by numismatics, consisting on a number of coins minted at Edessa by philoparthian king Waël, dated by Hill's catalogue between 163 and 165<sup>15</sup>. In this light, and assuming the region was still under Roman influence in 161, it has been argued that a change of regime favouring the Arsacids was undertaken, and an important part of historiography has drawn the conclusion that this was achieved through the taking of Edessa in 161, as a part of the Parthian advance from Armenia to Syria<sup>16</sup>. However, Waël's coinage not appearing until 163 seems to contradict this version of events, leading authors like Ross to propose the alternative hypothesis of a later taking of Edessa in 163, explained as a strategic manoeuvre in the context of the Roman counteroffensive<sup>17</sup>. Whilst Ross' theory is indeed more compatible with the sources, it is also reasonable to assume in the context of the war that the city was taken during Parthia's initial attack in 161. It is possible that Waël did not mint until two years into his reign.

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<sup>11</sup> *ILS* 2288 = *CIL* VI 3492. For dating cf. Mor, 1986: 267, n. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *CIL* VII 24; cf. Mor, 1986: 267.

<sup>13</sup> Mor, 1986: 267-275.

<sup>14</sup> D.C. 71.2.1.

<sup>15</sup> Hill, 1922: 91, 6-7; cf. Ross, 2000: 36. Bronze coinage, with the Syriac caption W'L MLK' —King Waël—, and a bust identified as Vologases IV.

<sup>16</sup> Debevoise, 1938: 246; Bivar, 1983: 93; Bishop, 2018: 97.

<sup>17</sup> Ross, 2000: 37; Birley, 2012: 219.

### 2.3. Attack on Syria

In their march south, Parthia would have finally crossed the Euphrates and entered Syria<sup>18</sup>. The *legatus Augusti pro praetore* in charge of the province since 156/7<sup>19</sup> was L. Attidius Cornelianus, who tried to oppose the invaders, but was eventually defeated. Unlike Severianus, he seemed to survive, and it also appears that he did not lose a complete legion. However, as the literary sources suggest<sup>20</sup>, as well as the accounts of the numerous reinforcements later sent by Verus, the casualties seem to have been high.

The Roman province of Syria, which included Judaea at the time, counted by 161 with no less than five legions (two of them guarding the conflictive Palestinian area)<sup>21</sup>. We can therefore expect that a defeat of the *exercitus Syriacus* was seen a much more serious event than what happened in Armenia, as the stability of the whole Empire was put in jeopardy. In addition, as the *Historia Augusta* suggests, this critical situation started materializing through a growing disaffection of Syrian population that threatened to scale into a general revolt<sup>22</sup>.

## 3. *Profectio Augusti*

It seems that once the news of Severianus' and Cornelianus' defeats reached Rome, measures were taken to organize a campaign against Vologases. It was also established that one of the emperors would go personally to the front, the one chosen being Lucius Verus. Thereby, the youngest of the Antonines would embark towards Antioch while Marcus Aurelius stayed at Rome.

### 3.1 .Why Verus?

In their dissimilar treatment of Verus' character, literary sources differ on the reasons of him being selected over his brother to lead the troops in the Parthian War. The *Historia Augusta*, from its notoriously hostile perspective on the emperor, claims Marcus Aurelius sent Verus so that «he might commit his debaucheries away from the city and the eyes of all citizens [...] or that he might return reformed through the fear inspired by war, or, finally, that he might come to realize that he was an emperor»<sup>23</sup>. However, Cassius Dio's account suggests quite the opposite, stating Verus was chosen because of his competences, as he was

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<sup>18</sup> Hist. Aug. *Aur.* 8.6; D.C. 71.2.1.

<sup>19</sup> *CIL* XVI 106. For a reconstruction of Cornelianus' *cursus honorum*, cf. Napp, 1879: 53-55

<sup>20</sup> Hist. Aug. *Ver.* 6.9 (“*caesis legionibus*”).

<sup>21</sup> Bishop, 2018: 98.

<sup>22</sup> Hist. Aug. *Ver.* 6.9 (“*Syris defectionem cogitantibus*”).

<sup>23</sup> Hist. Aug. *Ver.* 5.8.

«a vigorous man of younger years and better suited for military enterprises»<sup>24</sup> than his brother, who is said to be «frail in body» and «devoted the greater part of his time to letters»<sup>25</sup>. Physical skills aside, Verus seems to have had a better mastery of another quality of great importance in the Roman military world: rhetoric. This is shown in some of Fronto's letters<sup>26</sup>, as well as in the fact that it was him, and not his brother, who delivered the *adlocutio* to the Praetorian Guard when the co-emperors ascended to power in 161<sup>27</sup>.

As a result of this evidence on Verus' abilities and Marcus' disinterest on military life, some scholars have brought up the idea that their coregency was initially based on a sort of 'segregation of duties', in which the philosopher emperor would focus on civic matters and his brother on matters concerning the army<sup>28</sup>.

### 3.2. *Expeditio Orientalis*: chronology and route

In order to elaborate the reconstruction of Lucius Verus' journey to the eastern front that we hereby present, we relied on two main elements. On the one hand, numismatic evidence (and particularly the well-crafted succession of events Dodd made using them) give us an estimate chronology of the *profectio Augusti* and its stages. On the other hand, literary sources inform us about the vicissitudes of the expedition, each of them through their own angle.

#### *Leaving Rome*

News about the disasters occurred to the *exercitus Cappadocicus* in 161 and the *exercitus Syriacus* later that year do not seem to have reached Rome until early 162. This is confirmed by numismatics, as coins from the first tribunician year of Verus, 161, are centred on the commemoration of the rise of the new emperors, with captions such as *CONCORDIAE AVGVSTOR(um)*<sup>29</sup>, without any war implications. It is not until Verus' second tribunician year that references of military mobilization start to appear, in coins showing the emperor on horseback with the caption *PROFECTIO AVG(usti)*, a theme associated with the beginning of military expeditions<sup>30</sup>.

Previous attempts of establishing a *terminus post quem* on Verus' departure from the *Urbs* have not been entirely convincing. On the one hand, Dodd argues that the emperor was

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<sup>24</sup> D.C. 71.1.3.

<sup>25</sup> D.C. 71.1.2 (“αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ἀσθενὴς ἦν τῷ σώματι καὶ τὰ πολλὰ λόγοις ἐσχόλαζε”).

<sup>26</sup> Fronto *Ad Marcum Imp.* V.38-39 Fronto praises a speech by Verus (“*Sed et fratris tui oratio me delectavit, nam et ornata fuit et cordata; et certum habeo eum minimum spatii habuisse ad meditandum*”), observation endorsed by Marcus himself (“*Fratris autem mihi gratiarum actio eo laudabilior est, quo minus ad meditandum, ut conjectas, habuit spatii*”).

<sup>27</sup> *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 4.3. For an account on the importance of this event and the possible connection between Verus and the praetorians, cf. Bishop, 2018: 80-81 and the coins in *RIC*: III, 331, 1491.

<sup>28</sup> Scott, 2017: 33; Bishop, 2018: 82.

<sup>29</sup> Eckhel, 1792: VII, 89 = Cohen, 1883: *M. Aur.*, 69; cf. Dodd, 1911: 209-210.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, 1883: *M. Aur.*, 132-138, cf. Dodd, 1911: 210.

still in Rome on March 162, based on one of Fronto's letters he dates to 162. Notwithstanding, in the Loeb and Naber editions of Fronto, the same document is dated to 161<sup>31</sup>. For his part, Naber claims there is evidence in another of the letters of Verus staying in Rome still in April, but his dating is based on a hypothetical factor (Fronto's date of birth), which does not seem conclusive either. In any case, Verus must have left the city in early 162, with enough time to travel all the way to Antioch and be there by the end of the year. The *Historia Augusta* states that Marcus Aurelius accompanied his brother up to Capua<sup>32</sup>, from where Verus continued alone until Brindisium in order to embark to the east.

### *Disease at Canusium*

The next thing we know about Verus, though, is that he fell ill in the city of Canusium (currently Canosa di Puglia). Marcus Aurelius, who by that time was returning to Rome from Capua, turned around and came to his brother<sup>33</sup>. In the end, after three days of fasting and a bloodletting, Verus could continue his journey<sup>34</sup>.

As we may expect, the *Historia Augusta* attributes the sickness to Verus' wild lifestyle. Many scholars have linked the disease to the one that would eventually end his life in 169<sup>35</sup>, but the sources do not provide the necessary information to make a proper diagnosis. What seems evident is that Verus did not suffer from a chronic condition, if we are to believe the aforementioned praises about his physical vigour<sup>36</sup>.

### *From Italia to Syria*

From Brindisium the emperor would have travelled to Corinth<sup>37</sup>, from where we can assume he moved by land to Athens. Of his stay in the latter, there are some records: his former tutor Herodes Atticus would have hosted him and he would have been initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries<sup>38</sup>.

On the journey from Athens to Antioch, literary sources draw a general itinerary: Verus, sailing around the Anatolian coastline, stopped by «all the cities of Asia that bordered on the sea, and those cities of Pamphylia and Cilicia»<sup>39</sup> before reaching Syria. Through study of local epigraphy, though, scholarship has attempted to pinpoint the specific cities visited by Verus in said journey. Unfortunately, this task has proven to be virtually impossible, as this type of evidence (mostly statues and votive inscriptions) does not prove Verus was present at these cities, but rather that they had hopes of receiving him or wanted to pay him

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<sup>31</sup> Fronto *Ad Verum Imp.* I.5 (Naber: 118) (Loeb: I, 306); Dodd, 1911: 215; Naber, 1867: xxviii.

<sup>32</sup> *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 6.7.

<sup>33</sup> *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 6.7; *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 8.11.

<sup>34</sup> Fronto *Ad Verum Imp.* II.6.

<sup>35</sup> *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 9.11.

<sup>36</sup> D.C. 71.1.3.

<sup>37</sup> *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 6.9; Barnes 1967: pp. 65-79 confirms the year 162 for Verus' visit to Athens.

<sup>38</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 869; *Eus.Hist.* 14.4; cf. Birley, 2012: 218; Tüner, 2015: 972, n. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 6.9.

homage<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, a good part of these inscriptions cannot be accurately dated, so the alleged visit they record may have taken place in any of the emperor's movements through the region between 162 and 166<sup>41</sup>.

Only one of the inscriptions has been safely dated to 162: the one in Chios<sup>42</sup>. Another one from Ephesus shows the emperor paid numerous visits to the city, so it is plausible one of them took place in 162. Apart from these two, we find an inscription in Patara that Magie attributes somewhat ambiguously on the *Profectio*, but others like Barnes and Tüner do not date it explicitly. Along with there, there is a multitude of undated epigraphy in other *poleis* like Erythrai, Phaselis, Attaleia, Perge or Olba<sup>43</sup>.

### *Arriving to Antioch*

Numismatic evidence does not record the emperor's arrival to Syria until 163, appearing in a number of coins depicting the emperor and, on the reverse, a galley with the caption FELIC(itas) AVG(usti)<sup>44</sup>. These would have commemorated the Antonine's arrival to his destination<sup>45</sup>. Nevertheless, a Syrian epigraphic source seems to indicate Verus was already there in late 162<sup>46</sup>. Knowing the coinage was not minted until 163, we can assume that the emperor reached Syria by late 162 and the news reached the *Urbs* in early 163.

### **3.3. An unavoidable delay?**

As we just stated, Lucius Verus' journey lasted several months: from early 162 to the end of that same year. The *Historia Augusta*, from its hostile perspective, highlights the slow pace of the *Profectio*, which he attributes to Verus' love for hunting, music and other pleasures<sup>47</sup>. This criticism, however, is not present in any other literary source, and scholars from the recent pro-Verus historiographic revisionism argue that, considering the departure date, there was no need to haste anyway, as they would have still had to wait for the next spring to begin the operations<sup>48</sup>. In addition, even if the emperor's retinue could operate with an early arrival, it was necessary to wait for the numerous reinforcements (*legions* and

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<sup>40</sup> cf. Tüner, 2015: 972-973.

<sup>41</sup> His trip to Antioch in 162 (Hist. Aug. Ver. 6.7), to Ephesus for his wedding in 164 (Hist. Aug. Ver. 7.7; cf. Tüner, 2015: 973) and the way back to Rome in 166 (Tüner, 2015: 973).

<sup>42</sup> IGR IV 934; cf. Magie, 1950: 1530; Barnes, 1967: 71.

<sup>43</sup> Erythrai: *IvErythrai* 22; Phaselis: Tüner, 2015; Attaleia: *SEG* 17, 561-562; Perge: *IvPerge* 186; Olba: *SEG* 37 1295.

<sup>44</sup> Cohen, 1883: *Verus*, 69-84 = Eckhel, 1792: VII, 90; cf. Dodd, 1911: 215.

<sup>45</sup> Dodd, 1911: 215-216.

<sup>46</sup> *CIL* III 129; cf. Napp, 1879: 110. The inscription reports the construction of a building in Thelsease, Syria during Verus' second tribunician year (December 161 – December 162). The fact that Verus is named without his brother has led some to the reasonable conclusion that Verus was already in the east at the time. cf. Dodd, 1911: 215; Bishop, 2018: 96-97.

<sup>47</sup> Hist. Aug. Ver. 6.9.

<sup>48</sup> Bishop, 2018: 99-100.



*vexillationes*) called to compensate the casualties of the eastern legions (some of which came from provinces as remote as Pannonia or Germania)<sup>49</sup>.

## 4. Army structure and composition

### 4.1. Imperial entourage: *comites* and other companions

When an emperor came to the battlefield, he used to do so accompanied by a selection of generals destined to be his military advisers in the conflict, the so-called *comites* (companions)<sup>50</sup>. In our case we have attested, with varying degrees of certainty, an *eques* and three senators, all with extensive military experience: T. Furius Victorinus<sup>51</sup>, *eques* and *praefectus praetorio*, M. Pontius Lelianus<sup>52</sup>, described by Fronto as «tough and of old discipline» and who will take care of the instruction of the relaxed Syrian legions, M. Iallus Bassus<sup>53</sup> and M. Claudius Fronto<sup>54</sup>.

In addition to his military advisers, Verus would have surrounded himself with many other individuals in Syria, among which his circle of freedmen stands out, often mentioned in the *Historia Augusta*<sup>55</sup> as a bad influence for the emperor. The most recurring are Geminus, Agaclytus, Coedes and Eclectus.

### 4.2. Military forces

The *exercitus Cappadocicus*, after Severian's death at Elegeia in 161, was under the command of the *legatus Augusti pro praetore* M. Staius Priscus<sup>56</sup>, and by all accounts composed of three legions. Two of them seem well documented, *XII Fulminata*, based in Melitene, and *XV Apollinaris*, established in Satala; to which we add the Severian legion decimated by the Parthians in Elegeia.

Throughout the campaign, the *exercitus Syriacus* would have been under the command of three generals. The first, L. Attidius Cornelianus, was the *legatus Augusti pro praetore* of Syria at the time of the Parthian invasion of the province in 161/162. Cornelianus and his troops resisted for months until they were able to place themselves under Verus'

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<sup>49</sup> *CIL* III 7505 = *ILS* 2311; *CIL* 1377 = *ILS* 1098.

<sup>50</sup> cf. Bishop, 2018: 101.

<sup>51</sup> *CIL* VI 41143 = *ILS* 9002 = *AE* 1907, 152. In the inscription it is not mentioned explicitly as *comes*, but as a Praetorian Prefect it is reasonable to assume that he stayed with the emperor in Syria: cf. Birley, 2000: 160-161; Bishop, 2018: 101.

<sup>52</sup> *CIL* VI 1497, 1549 = *ILS* 1094, 1100 = *CIL* VI 41146; *AE* 2006, 1841; Fronto *Ad Verum Imp.* II.1.

<sup>53</sup> *CIL* XII 2718; 1719.

<sup>54</sup> *CIL* VI 1377 = *ILS* 1098; his role as emperor's *comes* in the Parthian War is controversial: cf. Bishop, 2018: 102; Napp, 1879: p69-70.

<sup>55</sup> *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 9.5-6; *Aur.* 15.2.

<sup>56</sup> *AE* 1910, 86; *CIL* VI 1523; *AE* 1910, 86; *CIL* VI 1523; cf. Napp, 1879: 55.

command upon arrival. Furthermore, if the emperor arrived - as an aforementioned epigraphic source seems to indicate<sup>57</sup> - at the end of 162, we could deduce that Cornelianus briefly continued to hold provincial command shortly after Verus' arrival, since he is mentioned as such in that same inscription. M. Annius Libo<sup>58</sup>, sent to replace Cornelianus in 162, died shortly after arriving in Syria. Finally, according to an inscription on the realization of public works, Libo seems to have been succeeded in office by Cn. Julius Verus<sup>59</sup>.

As for the forces that made up this *exercitus Syriacus*, the Roman province of Syria would have stationed three legions during the Antonine period, which were, according to M'Elderry, *III Gallica* in Raphanea, *XVI Flavia Firma* in Samosata and *III Scythica* in Zeugma. According to Bishop, the *legatus legionis* of *Gallica III* in 162 was C. Avidius Cassius, who would soon acquire a great role in the war by holding the general command of the troops during the counteroffensive on the Mesopotamian front. On the other hand, since Hadrian had expanded the province of Syria to include Judea, there is great controversy<sup>60</sup> over the possible participation in the Parthian War of the three legions stationed in the Levantine strip —*X Fretensis*, in Jerusalem, *VI Ferrata* in Caparcotia and *III Cyrenaica* in Bostra—.

With the double objective of compensating the casualties inflicted by the Arsacid offensive of 161/162 and enlarging the army, the displacement of additional military corps from the borders of the Rhine and the Danube to Syria was deemed necessary. The epigraphy attests the participation of at least three reinforcement legions in this *expeditio orientalis*, commanded by their respective *legatus legionis*: *V Macedonica* by M. Martius Verus<sup>61</sup>, *II Adiutrix* by M. Antistius Adventus<sup>62</sup>, and *I Minervia* by the already mentioned M. Claudius Fronto<sup>63</sup>. For his part, P. Julius Geminius Marcianus<sup>64</sup> was entrusted with the task of leading a group made up of  *vexillationes* (groups of legionaries or auxiliaries split from a legion) from different legions on the Rhine and the Danube, in order to restore the strength of damaged eastern legions.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that, according to Fronto, Verus and his *comites* not only encountered troops with quantitative losses due to the initial defeats, but that, qualitatively —and especially the Syrians— their condition was also deplorable. Fronto

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<sup>57</sup> *CIL* III 129.

<sup>58</sup> Libo was *patrueilis* (first cousin on the father's side) of M. Aurelius, who would have personally chosen him for the position, according to *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 9.2.

<sup>59</sup> *Legatus legionis* of *XXX Ulpia*, Verus held provincial command of Lower Germany and Britain, before being posted to the east: *CIL* III 2732 = *CIL* III 8714; *CIL* III 199 records public works in Syria between 163 and 165.

<sup>60</sup> Also, the *III Cyrenaica* appears in a *graffito* found in Dura-Europos of dubious dating.

<sup>61</sup> *CIL* III 7505 = *ILS* 2311; Dio Cassius speaks of him in highly glowing terms: *D.C.* 71.3.1.

<sup>62</sup> *CIL* 18893.

<sup>63</sup> *CIL* 1377 = *ILS* 1098; *ILS* 1097; Birley, 2000: 161.

<sup>64</sup> *CIL* VIII 7050; cf. Napp, 1879: 71-72.

makes an illustrative description of the undisciplined soldiers of Antioch and informs us of the measures taken to solve this issue by both Pontius Laelianus and Verus himself<sup>65</sup>.

## 5 The Roman Counter-offensive: Armenia

Upon arrival, military enterprises carried out by Lucius Verus were split in various fronts. Thus, we identify three different and traditionally considered consecutive counter-offensives in Armenia, Osrhoene and Mesopotamia. In this section we will tackle the first one.

If we stay with date of late 162 for Verus' arrival to Syria, we may assume that the war preparations took place in the winter of 162-163, and the opening of the war season in the new year would have meant the official start of the operations. Numismatic evidence seems to confirm this chronology, as we find coins from 163 depicting the youngest of the Antonines addressing a group of soldiers with the caption ADLOCVT<sup>66</sup>. According to Dodd, the *adlocutio* —the general's speech to his troops— is often depicted as a symbol of the official beginning of a military campaign (as can be seen in such notable examples as the Trajan's Column)<sup>67</sup>.

### 5.1. Verus in Antioch: *otium* or *negotium*?

According to the literary sources, Lucius Verus stayed in the city of Antioch during the course of Parthian War, with occasional trips to the suburb of Daphne in summer<sup>68</sup>, to the coastal villa of Laodicea in winter<sup>69</sup>, and to Ephesus in order to wed Lucilla<sup>70</sup>. Based on this fact, the *Historia Augusta* —and thus, a part of modern historiography— keep depicting the emperor as a negligent hedonist, and claim that, like during the journey to Syria, Verus spent his time in Antioch dedicated to pleasure. Fronto<sup>71</sup> and Cassius Dio present us with a different Verus, though, who «keeping the best of the leaders under his personal command, took up his own headquarters in the city, where he made all the dispositions and assembled the supplies for the war»<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Fronto *Ad Verum Imp.* II.1.19; cf. Fronto *Prin. Hist.* 12.

<sup>66</sup> Cohen, 1883: *Verus*, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Dodd, 1911: 265.

<sup>68</sup> Birley, 2012: p. 218; Debevoise, 1938: 248.

<sup>69</sup> D.C. 71.2.1; *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 7.3.

<sup>70</sup> *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 9.4.

<sup>71</sup> Fronto *Ad Verum Imp.* II.1, II.3.

<sup>72</sup> D.C. 71.2.2.

In any case, the emperor's stay in the city implied that he would delegate all of the actual war-making to his commanders, a fact that the *Historia Augusta* loves to remind us<sup>73</sup>. This negative tone that Verus' sedentariness acquires is largely based on the unfortunate comparison with the eastern campaigns of Trajan, who did personally lead his troops in both Armenia and Mesopotamia. However, as the revisionist pro-Verus historiography suggests, Trajan's case was exceptional, and in the first two centuries of the Principate it was not to be expected from an emperor to fight along with his troops, and thus staying away from the front leading the operations was the habitual procedure (especially for an emperor as Verus, who lacked military experience). Furthermore, in a war with fronts so distant, the emperor's physical presence in one of them hindered an effective response to any unforeseen event that might happen in the rest, a problem that did not exist from the equidistance of Antioch<sup>74</sup> — which also allowed him to supervise the progress in Armenia while he prepared the Mesopotamian Campaign—.

## 5.2. The counter-offensive: Armenia

Our available sources on the Roman counter-offensive in Armenia are, at the very least, rare. On the one hand, the *Historia Augusta* only mentions that the new *legatus Augusti pro praetore* of Cappadocia, Statius Priscus, led the troops, and that, as it had happened in previous occasions, the war in Armenia ended with capture of the city of Artaxata by the Romans<sup>75</sup>. On the other hand, Fronto and some numismatic evidence attest the appointment of a philoroman king into Armenia, Sohaemus<sup>76</sup>, and Cassius Dio mentions the foundation of a «new city» (*Καινήν πόλιν*) in Armenia<sup>77</sup>, that Deveboise identifies with today's Valarshapat<sup>78</sup>. Every other detail of the campaign is unknown to us, and the only way to tackle them is through speculation and hypothesis.

### *The route to Armenia*

One of the details largely ignored by historiography is the starting point and route of Priscus' expedition, so the comparison with previous campaigns is the only way to find possible solutions. Bishop, due to the problematic state of Syria during the first stages of the war, discards a potential departure from the city of Zeugma, opting for a march from one of the legionary stations in Cappadocia, Satala or Melitene<sup>79</sup>, the latter being the city from where Trajan would have departed in his eastern campaign<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Hist. Aug. Ver. 7.1-3. In Hist. Aug. Ver. 7.6-7, however, it is mentioned that he went to the Euphrates «insisted by his *comites*» (*impulsum comitum suum sequendo*).

<sup>74</sup> Bishop, 2018: 115.

<sup>75</sup> Hist. Aug. Aur. 9.1.

<sup>76</sup> Fronto, *Prin. Hist.* 15.

<sup>77</sup> D.C. 71.5.1. cf. Birley, 2000: p. 163; Bishop, 2018: 123.

<sup>78</sup> Deveboise, 1938: 249.

<sup>79</sup> Bishop, 2018: 119.

<sup>80</sup> As some infer from Procop. *Aed.* 3.4.17.

### *The capture of Artaxata*

Our next piece of information is the successful capture of the city of Artaxata<sup>81</sup>. The only source that provides additional information on this subject is Lucian, who in his *Quomodo*, fiercely criticizes one of the self-proclaimed historians who wrote about the conflict, who claimed that Prisco had knocked down twenty-seven enemies with only his voice<sup>82</sup>. The sources do not record any kind of direct confrontation with the Parthian army, so we ignore whether any battle worthy of mention was fought apart from the final siege, although the swift development of the campaign seems to indicate that it did not encounter too many inconveniences.

### *Armeniacus*

In spite of the notorious lack of documentation for the campaign in Armenia, the appearance of evidence from the Roman victory (mainly through numismatics) provides us with interesting information on the chronology of events. The first milestone is the appearance of coins that include two new titles for Verus, *Armeniacus* and the *Cognomen Imperatoris* of *Imp. II*<sup>83</sup>. These distinctions appeared for the first time in a series of coins representing a personification of Armenia prostrate in defeat, which date from Verus' third tribunician year. This indicates that the Armenian campaign ended the same year it had begun: 163 (the uniformity of the types leads Dodd to date its minting to the last months of the year)<sup>84</sup>.

As co-emperor, Marcus Aurelius also had the right of calling himself *Armeniacus*, a title that, according to the *Historia Augusta*, «first he rejected due to his modesty, but later he accepted» (*Marcus per verecundiam primo recusavit, postea tamen recepit*)<sup>85</sup>. Numismatic evidence, however, seems to indicate that Marcus did assume the *Cognomen Imperatoris* of *Imp. II* from the beginning<sup>86</sup>.

### *Rex Armeniis Datus*

On 164 numismatic types relating to victory start to appear<sup>87</sup>. Among them all, the one showing the emperor sitting, wearing *lorica* and *paludamentum* and crowning the new king of Armenia, with the legend REX ARMEN(iis) DAT(us)<sup>88</sup>, stands out. Fronto, in the letter referred to as *Principia Historiae*, mentions that Vero gave Armenia to a king called

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<sup>81</sup> Hist. Aug. Aur. 9.1.

<sup>82</sup> Luc. Hist.Cons. 20.

<sup>83</sup> The title *Imperator (Imp.)* is present twice in Roman emperors. On the one hand, it is present at the beginning (*Praenomen Imperatoris*), referring to the sum of his authority (*imperium*) over the Roman world. On the other hand, we have the *Cognomen Imperatoris*, followed by a number, referring to the number of times he was acclaimed by the troops; cf. McFayden, 1920: 1.

<sup>84</sup> Dodd, 1911: p217.

<sup>85</sup> Hist. Aug. Aur. 9.1.

<sup>86</sup> Cohen, 1883: *M. Aur.*, 42.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*: *M. Aur.*, 466-467; *Verus* 247; *M. Aur.*, 49; cf. Dodd, 1911: p. 219-221.

<sup>88</sup> Cohen, 1883: *Verus*, 157.

Sohaemus<sup>89</sup>, also mentioned by Photius<sup>90</sup>. Some scholars claim that this Sohaemus is the same *Rex Armeniis Datus* appointed by Antoninus Pius and deposed by Pacorus in 161, being now reappointed with Priscus' victory. This is what Birley believes, who also asserts that his full name was C. Julius Sohaemus, that was a Roman citizen (a consul, even) and that would have spent the period of 161-163/4 in exile in the *Urbs*<sup>91</sup>.

## 6 The Roman Counter-offensive: Osrhoene

With the situation under control in Armenia, the war effort focused on securing Syria and the Upper Euphrates, and the majority of the literary sources skip on to the Mesopotamian Campaign led by Avidius Cassius, regarded as the most important episode of the war. There is, however, some data on the events in Osrhoene that we have tried to compile in this section.

For this purpose, numismatics is once again our most precious ally, as it informs us about the philoparthian king Waël ruling Edessa by 164<sup>92</sup> (regardless if he ascended to the throne in 161 or 163). Sometime later (our chronology is rudimentary for the region) we already see coinage minted by a philoroman king, Ma'nu VIII, revealing a Roman retaking of the city<sup>93</sup>.

Of the literary sources, scholars use a passage by Procopius<sup>94</sup> as a reference of this retaking, which states —without any precise contextual or chronological information— that the citizens of Edessa drove away the Parthian force themselves and willingly submitted to Rome. On the other hand, Lucian's *Quomodo*, through the words of a criticized pseudo-historian, mentions how «the clash of weapons surrounded Edessa» (*Εδεσσα μὲν δὴ οὕτω τοῖς ὅπλοις περιεσμαραγεῖτο*)<sup>95</sup>; but nothing can assure us that it refers to this specific event.

Our last clue is provided by epigraphic evidence, in the form of a title held by general Claudius Fronto: *legatus Augustorum pro praetore exercitus legionarii et auxiliorum per orientem in Armeniam et Osrhoenam et Anthemusiam*<sup>96</sup>. This suggests that Fronto, after serving as *legatus legionis* in the Armenian Campaign, was put in charge of an army (which probably included his legion, the *I Minervia*) tasked with recapturing, from Armenia, the regions of Osrhoene and Anthemusia.

Taking all this evidence into account, we only know that, at some point after the Armenian Campaign, Roman control of Osrhoene was recovered through a task force probably led by Claudius Fronto, and a philoroman ruler was subsequently reappointed. If one desires to

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<sup>89</sup> Fronto, *Prin. Hist.* 15.

<sup>90</sup> Iamblichus, in Phot. *Bibl.* 94.

<sup>91</sup> Birley, 1988: 224.

<sup>92</sup> Hill, 1922: 91, 6-7; cf. Ross, 2000: 36.

<sup>93</sup> Hill, 1922: 92-93, 9 (*PHAANTONINOCC*).

<sup>94</sup> Procop. *Pers.* 2.12.29; cf. Debevoise, 1938: 253.

<sup>95</sup> Luc. *Hist.Cons.* 22.

<sup>96</sup> *CIL* III 1377; cf. Napp, 1879: 117-118.

dwell deeper, though, we depend entirely on modern historians' speculation. Thus, some date the Osrhoenan counter-offensive to early 164, after Armenia<sup>97</sup>. Bishop further suggests that Fronto's troops would have met with the *exercitus Syriacus* of Avidius Cassius, who would have been the real liberators of the city<sup>98</sup>. Birley claims the offensive started in 164 in Anthemusia, placing the taking of Edessa in 165, in parallel with the Mesopotamian Campaign. Debevoise, on the other hand, offers another version of the facts. According to him, the withdrawal of the Roman troops after Avidius Cassius' campaign in Mesopotamia was followed by an immediate advance that not only recovered the lost ground, but also, he says, led to the dethronement of King Sohaemus, recently enthroned by Rome. As a result, in 166 there would have been a forced Roman counter-offensive during which the operations in Osrhoene and the taking of Edessa had to take place<sup>99</sup>.

The authors do agree, however, on associating the capture of Edessa with that of the city of Nisibis, situated on the banks of Osroena and to whose capture we find vague allusions in Lucian<sup>100</sup>. Thus, Birley affirms that the capture of Nisibis would have taken place during the same offensive of 165 in which Edessa was recovered, and Bishop is of the same opinion. Both of them also link the capture of Nisibis to the episode of the Parthian general Osrhoes fleeing the battle and swimming across the Tigris<sup>101</sup>. So does Debevoise, who claims that the capture of Nisibis followed that of Edessa in the Roman counter-offensive that he dates to 166, even suggesting that it was in this counter-offensive that the Roman troops went so far into their march east as to justify the title of *Medicus* later bestowed on Lucius Verus.

## 7 The Roman Counter-offensive: Syria and Mesopotamia

Assuming, then, as we have just seen in the previous section, the uncertainty in which we find ourselves regarding the chronology of the Osrhoenan campaign, and taking up again the somewhat safe chronological line provided by numismatics, we may observe that after the well-documented victory in Armenia in late 163/early 164, there is a whole year without mention of new victories. It is not until well into 165 that we find coinage with the titles *Parthicus Maximus* and *Imp. III*, marking the Roman victory on the last and main front: Syria-Mesopotamia. This offensive, however, is difficult to date with certainty, so it is not known whether there was simultaneousness between the Armenian and Mesopotamian campaigns or whether they were strictly consecutive.

### 7.1. Avidius Cassius' extraordinary command

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<sup>97</sup> Garzetti, 1974: 478-479; Birley, 1987: 140-141.

<sup>98</sup> Bishop, 2018: 126.

<sup>99</sup> Debevoise, 2018: 253.

<sup>100</sup> Luc. *Hist.Cons.* 15.

<sup>101</sup> Luc. *Hist.Cons.* 19.

The command of the *exercitus Syriacus* in the Mesopotamian Campaign would have technically belonged to the province's *legatus Augusti pro praetore*, a position held in 164/5 by Julius Verus. However, literary sources state that it was not him, but C. Avidius Cassius, at that time a *legatus legionis* under Julius Verus himself, who would end up commanding the expedition on this front<sup>102</sup>. This extraordinary command is similar to the one given to Claudius Fronto in Osrhoene, although Fronto's powers did not contradict the jurisdiction of any provincial governor, as in the case of Avidius Cassius.

## 7.2. Between Syria and the Euphrates: Zeugma

As with the Armenian campaign, the first question we encounter when we approach Casio's expedition is its starting point. In this regard, authors such as Bishop propose a departure from the city of Zeugma<sup>103</sup>. Situated in northern Syria—in the so-called Commagene—on the banks of the Euphrates and close to Antioch, Zeugma is often mentioned in literary sources as a starting point for Roman expeditions into Mesopotamia<sup>104</sup>, which usually consist on descending the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf (with occasional incursions to the Tigris)<sup>105</sup>. All this, together with the supposed status of the city as the headquarters of a legion, the *III Scythica*<sup>106</sup>, makes Bishop's hypothesis at the very least plausible, although ultimately there is no conclusive evidence supporting him.

## 7.3. The advance

### *The problem of Europos*

«Europos» (*Εὐρωπός*) is perhaps the most recurrent city appearing in Lucian's *Quomodo* in the context of the war. He takes note on a close battle between Romans and Arsacids there<sup>107</sup>. This location has been traditionally identified as the well-known city of Dura-Europos<sup>108</sup>, but other scholars like Leriche argue that it refers to an entirely different city, named simply Europos (also known as Karkamish) and located on the Euphrates' bank south of Zeugma<sup>109</sup>. If we assume, then, that Zeugma was indeed the starting point of the campaign, it is likely that one of the first major battles of the campaign took place there. Lucian gives some scarce references to this scuffle, talking about «charges» (*ἐπελάσεις*) and «forced armistice» (*σπονδὰς ἀναγκαίας*)<sup>110</sup>, but without any more details of interest.

### *Descent of the Euphrates: other milestones*

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<sup>102</sup> D.C. 71.2.2 (“διατάπτων ἕκαστα καὶ τὰς τοῦ πολέμου χορηγίας ἀθροίζων, Κασσίω δὲ τὰ στρατεύματα”).

<sup>103</sup> Bishop, 2018: 128.

<sup>104</sup> Zeugma is mentioned as a gateway into Mesopotamia in the context of Crassus' campaign (Plu. *Crass.* 19.3), as well as Antony's, where the city is explicitly mentioned to be a usual river crossing point (D.C. 49.19.3).

<sup>105</sup> The most renowned case being Trajan's campaign.

<sup>106</sup> M'Elderry, 1909: 49; *CIL* 14396e.

<sup>107</sup> Luc. *Hist.Cons.* 20, 24, 28.

<sup>108</sup> Debevoise, 1938: 250, n. 55; Birley, 2000: p. 166; Leriche, 1986: 78, n. 29.

<sup>109</sup> Edwell, 2010: p. 116, 247; Bishop, 2018: p. 128.

<sup>110</sup> Luc. *Hist.Cons.* 28.



In addition to the Battle of Europos, literary sources mention some of the other stages of this campaign. Thus, Lucian in his *Quomodo* mentions the wounded in Sura (Suriyya), while Fronto states that the cities of Dausara (present-day Qal'at Ja'bar) and Nicephorium (Raqqa) were taken by force of arms<sup>111</sup>. In addition to the locations mentioned in the literary sources, some authors, following purely geographical criteria, ventured to propose other towns on the banks of the Euphrates that Cassius' expedition might have crossed. These include Caeciliana, Amphipolis-Nikatoris, Alexandros and Barbalissos (between Zeugma and Dausara) and Circesium (between Nicephorium and Dura-Europos)<sup>112</sup>.

#### *Dura-Europos and the archeological evidence*

Whether or not it is the same Europos referred to by Lucian, it is likely that Dura-Europos played a part in the Roman counter-offensive. This, in addition to being a plausible guess given the route of the expedition, seems to be supported by archaeological evidence. Archaeologists have recognised a considerable breach in the northern side of the city walls, later repaired with adobe, which Leriche dates back to the Parthian campaigns of Trajan or Lucius Vero (although he seems to be leaning towards the latter)<sup>113</sup>. Bishop, on the other hand, suggests a double breaching of the walls: the first by Trajan and then by Avidius Cassius, who would have taken advantage of the recent breach<sup>114</sup>. However, this is only an unsubstantiated hypothesis.

#### *The crossing of the Euphrates*

As the final destination of the expedition was the city of Seleucia on the Tigris, on the banks of the river of the same name, it can be assumed that the Roman expedition crossed the Euphrates at some point on its descent in order to march eastwards. This crossing seems to align with one of the two passages from Cassius Dio's book 71 surviving to this day (through the *Suda*), in which the process of building a boat bridge is narrated in great detail. The passage, though, stops at the general technical details and barely alludes to Cassius' campaign<sup>115</sup>. Debevoise quite convincingly places the crossing of the Euphrates after the capture of Sura, as this city is located on the right bank of the river, whereas the other locations mentioned by the sources south of Sura (Dausara, Nicephorium, Dura-Europos) are all on the left bank<sup>116</sup>.

### **7.4. Seleucia-Ctesiphon**

Finally, Cassius and his army would reach the twin cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, located on the left and right banks of the Tigris respectively. The former was a large city founded by the first of the Seleucids, where the Hellenic influence was still present both in its urbanism

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<sup>111</sup> Fronto, *Ad Verum Imp.* II.1 (“*Dausara et Nicephorium [...] armis capta sunt*”).

<sup>112</sup> Bishop, 2018: 129-132.

<sup>113</sup> Leriche, 1986: 77-78.

<sup>114</sup> Bishop, 2018: 73.

<sup>115</sup> D.C. 71.5.1.

<sup>116</sup> Debevoise, 1938: 250-251.

and its demography. According to several ancient historians (probably from a common source), the inhabitants of the *urbem nobilissimam* of Seleucia would have numbered 400,000 at the time<sup>117</sup>. On the other hand, Ctesiphon was founded by the Parthians and served as the capital of the Arsacid kingdom, housing the royal palace.

Fortunately, the literary sources break their silence when it comes to the takeover of these cities. The *Historia Augusta* states that the Roman army was welcomed upon its arrival<sup>118</sup>, a fact that fits in well with the image of a city in constant enmity with the Parthians transmitted by authors such as Plutarch<sup>119</sup>. Nonetheless, at some point the situation was turned upside down, and Seleucia ended up being attacked by Roman troops, with Cassius declaring that it was «burned; completely destroyed» (*διέφθειρεν ἐμπρήσας*), and Vologases' palace destroyed to the «ground» (*κατέσκαψεν*)<sup>120</sup>. The *Historia Augusta* contemplates possible versions of the events: one in which he blames Cassius for the sacking and the other, claimed to be Asinius Quadratus' version, in which the Seleucians would have been the one responsible for breaking the agreement with the Romans<sup>121</sup>.

The apparent magnitude of the damage caused to Seleucia that we find in testimonies Cassius Dio's, added to the disappearance of Seleucia from the historical record when it was re-established years later by the Sassanians as Veh-Ardashir, has led some to the conclusion that the attack of Cassius meant the end of Seleucia<sup>122</sup>. However, numismatics and archaeology seem to suggest otherwise. R.H. McDowell, who took part in the excavations carried out in Seleucia by the University of Michigan in the 1920s and 1930s, states in his *Coins from Seleucia* that in November 166, barely a year after the date on which the incursion is generally dated, the city was already minting silver tetradrachms, a trend that continued the following years. McDowell additionally affirms that the results from the excavations show that the damage taken by the city during the conflict was not as terrible as literary sources claim<sup>123</sup>.

## 7.5. Parthicus Maximus; Medicus

Our basic chronology of this campaign rests once again essentially on Roman numismatic sources. The basic reference is found in the assumption by Verus (and later Marcus Aurelius) of the titles of *Parthicus Maximus* and *Imp. III*, attested to in coinage minted in late 165<sup>124</sup>.

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<sup>117</sup> Eutr. 8.10; Oros. *Hist.* 7.15 (*cum quadrigentis milibus hominem*). The latter mistakenly places the city on the river Hydaspes (*super Hydaspes fluvium sitam*).

<sup>118</sup> Hist. Aug. Ver. 8.3 (*ut amicos milites nostros receperat*).

<sup>119</sup> Plu. *Crass.* 16.8. To see more examples of Seleucia rebelling against Arsacid rule, cf. Bivar 1983.

<sup>120</sup> D.C. 71.2.3.

<sup>121</sup> Hist. Aug. Ver. 8.3.

<sup>122</sup> Birley, 2000: 163.

<sup>123</sup> McDowell, 1935: 234.

<sup>124</sup> Cohen, 1883: Verus, 193; cf. Dodd, 1911: 235. The evidence shows Marcus Aurelius waited some time before assuming the title *Parthicus Maximus*, whereas he immediately took *Imp. III*.

These titles can be easily identified with the Mesopotamian Campaign, allowing us to date the capture of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to the end of 165.

However, there is still an unresolved issue that has given rise to different theories. This would be the appearance of new numismatic types in 166, displaying a new victory by adding a numeral to the *Cognomen Imperatoris* (*Imp. IIII*) and, in some cases, also adding the new title of *Medicus*. We do not know what the facts might be that justify both the new victory and the new title. Scholars give different explanations: Birley, for example, suggests the possibility of a brief incursion into Media by Cassius, whereas Bishop links the titles to the victory at Ctesiphon, which, sitting on the eastern bank of the Tigris, is technically part of Media. Dodd, for his part, insists on separating the *Medicus*, rare and inconsistent in the sources, from *Imp. IIII*, which does appear on all the coins since 166, suggesting that there is no link between the two titles and that the updating of the *Cognomen Imperatoris* refers to a victory against the Parthians unrelated to the events, whatever they may be, that inspired the *Medicus* title<sup>125</sup>.

## 8. Conclusions

After our compilation of every hint, debate and contradiction in the sources, we can safely affirm that this study constitutes one of the most thorough and up-to-date reports on the Roman-Parthian War of 161-166 AD currently available. It is only through a whole new reinterpretation of the facts or, conversely, the discovery of new evidence —such as new Edessan coinage or Syrian epigraphy— that the remaining problems (e.g., the chronology and route of the Osroenean campaign, the identity of Severianus' legion or the *profectio's* itinerary) could be tackled in the near future.

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<sup>125</sup> Dodd, 1911: 251-252; Bishop, 2018: 132.

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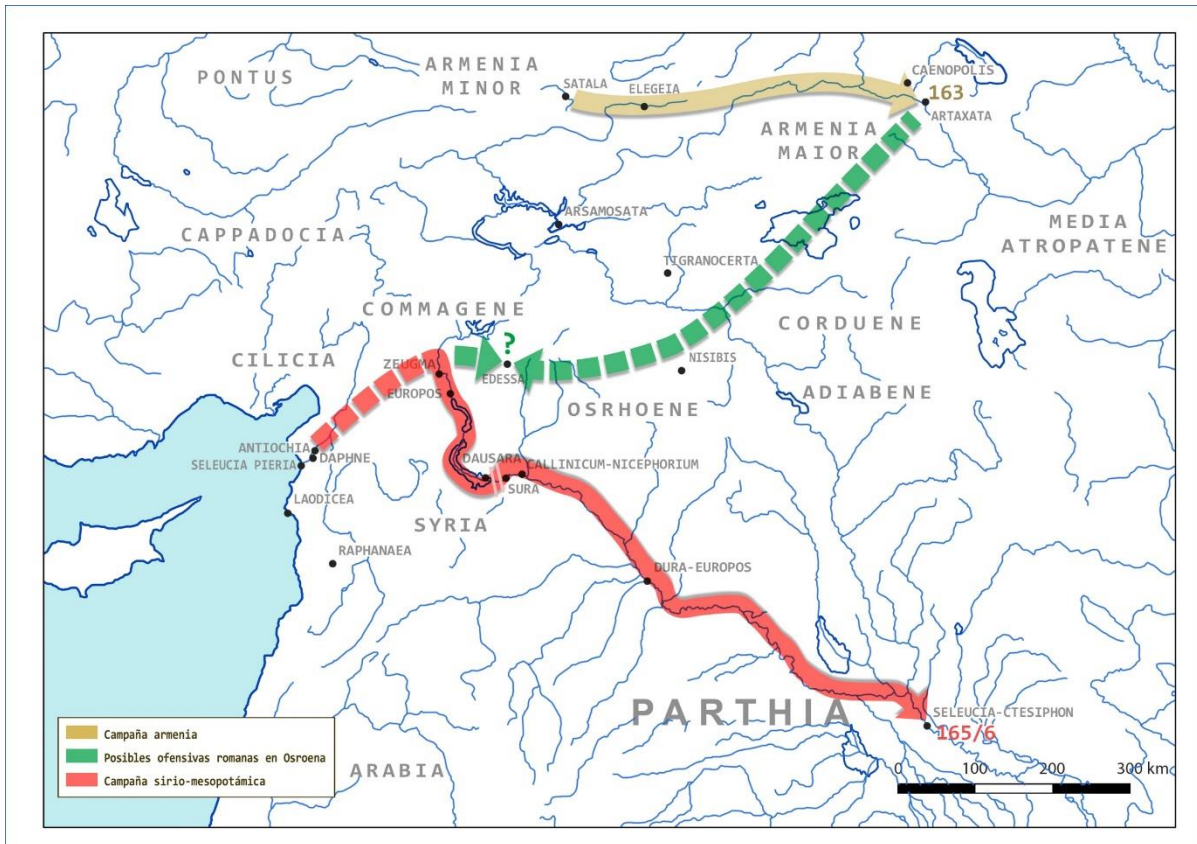
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# Appendix



[Figure 1] Cartographic rendition of the campaign as results from our investigation, distinguishing between the main offensives (162-166; map legend in Spanish).

## Biography

Nacido en Sevilla en 1998, cursó el Grado en Historia en la Universidad de Sevilla (2016-2020), obteniendo el Premio a la Mejor Nota de Admisión. Cursó una estancia Erasmus en el University College London (UCL), y actualmente es estudiante del Máster Universitario en Estudios Históricos Avanzados en la Universidad de Sevilla, así como Becario de Colaboración del Departamento de Historia Antigua de dicho centro.